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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000505

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SUBJECT: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PM'S POLITICAL ADVISOR

Classified By: A/DCM SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. A recently returned Humphrey Fellow who has been working as the senior political advisor at the PM's office since 2004, shared his impressions of PM Souare, whom he sees as largely ineffective. He also recounted three visits with President Conte over the last four years. The contact sees the president as clearly unwell physically, but actively trying to groom his personal successor, as well as the path of succession. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On September 5, A/DCM met with the Prime Minister's Senior Political Advisor, Aboubacar Koulibaly. Having just returned from a Humphrey Fellowship at the University of North Carolina, Koulibaly has only been working with Prime Minister Souare for three months. However, he was originally appointed to the position in 2004 under former Prime Minister Cellou Diallo, and also worked for former Prime Minister Fal, and then briefly for former Prime Minister Kouyate.

JUST PUTTING OUT FIRES

¶3. (C) Koulibaly told A/DCM that he does not expect to stay at the PM's office for much longer because "there is nothing to do." He said that he has been coming to the office only a few days a week since the PM has not passed any work his way. According to Koulibaly, when he met with Souare, the PM told him he was not sure what Koulibaly could do for him. Under the August 27 presidential decree that restructured the civil service, Koulibaly was reassigned from his position as chief political advisor to "governance advisor." However, Koulibaly says that he still has not been informed as to how he can contribute to the PM's program. He is exploring a possible position with UNDP to head up their governance program.

¶4. (C) Koulibaly described the PM as a "day to day manager." He said that Souare has not developed any political strategy or reform program because he is focusing on putting out the small fires, such as various labor strikes and the May military mutiny, that continue to plague the government.

¶5. (C) "The current government cannot be committed to reform because they are part of the problem," Koulibaly said. He added that the only way Guinea can move forward is if the president is removed from power. According to Koulibaly, recent shuffles of senior GoG positions reflects the president's careful strategy to slowly repopulate the government with loyal supporters (especially members of the ruling Party for Unity and Progress - PUP). "Eventually, he will leave the PM absolutely powerless," Koulibaly said.

VIEWS ON THE PRESIDENT

¶ 6. (C) When A/DCM asked Koulibaly how often he sees the president, he said that he has seen him three times, once in 2004 with Cellou Diallo, once in 2007 with Kouyate, and just recently in July 2008 with former finance minister Kassory Fofana. Koulibaly described the president as enthusiastic about political reforms during their 2004 meeting. He said that the president told them (Diallo and Koulibaly) that their ideas sounded good, and that they should go ahead and do what they needed to do. At one point, Koulibaly said that Conte said "I am tired; I just want to go back to the village." However, Koulibaly told Diallo afterwards that the president is sick and asked whether or not it was prudent to trust him. At that time, he was also convinced that Conte's ill health would prevent him from living out the year.

¶ 7. (C) Three years later, during the 2007 meeting with Kouyate, Koulibaly said that he focused on Conte's body language. "He never looked at Kouyate throughout the entire discussion; there was no respect, and he was not sincere." He added that the president's only comment was made more to the audience around Kouyate. He reportedly said "the people say he is good; I want him to show me that he is good." Koulibaly stepped away from that meeting with the impression that the relationship between the PM and the president would be strained, and that the president "was planning something." Again, he saw Conte as frail and unlikely to live out the year.

¶ 8. (C) The recent July courtesy call on the president with Kassory Fofana was more public and Koulibaly did not have an opportunity to witness any private exchanges. He said that there was a crowd of people around the president, and that

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Conte looked worse physically than he ever has. Joking, Koulibaly told A/DCM "I am done making any predictions about when he is going to die - but soon?"

¶ 9. (C) However, Koulibaly cautioned that the president sometimes tries to appear more ill than he really is in order to keep people guessing. He was sure that Conte is "up to something" to get rid of PM Souare in order to put his "real face" out there. According to Koulibaly, Conte is probably grooming his successor while simultaneously paving the way for the succession. (COMMENT. The name that most often comes up when contacts talk about a groomed successor is former finance minister Kassory Fofana. END COMMENT).

COMMENT

¶ 10. (C) Koulibaly comes across as a thoughtful, analytical observer of the political dynamic between the PM and the President, and Guinean politics in general, despite his nine-month hiatus. He was convinced that the current government is useless and does not stand a chance of any real reform efforts. Koulibaly was also adamant that Guinea's best solution would be a coup d-etat of one sort or another (either precipitated by the military or by civil society). He held fast to this conviction even when A/DCM pointed out the obvious risks to this approach, especially given the recent military mutiny and clear lack of discipline within Guinea's armed forces. END COMMENT.

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